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Member/Officer Protocol

1. Background

- a. This protocol is intended to assist Councillors and the Clerk, in approaching some of the sensitive circumstances which arise in a challenging working environment.
- b. The reputation and integrity of the Council is significantly influenced by the effectiveness of Councillors, the Clerk and other staff working together to support each other's roles.
- c. The aim is effective and professional working relationships characterised by mutual trust, respect and courtesy. Close personal familiarity should be avoided.

2. Roles of Councillors

- a. The respective roles of Councillors and employees can be summarised as follows:
Councillors and Officers are servants of the public and they are indispensable to one and other, but their responsibilities are distinct.
Councillors are responsible to the electorate and serve only so long as their term of office lasts.
Officers are responsible to the Council. Their job is to give advice to Councillors and to the Council, and to carry out the Council's work under the direction and control of the Council and relevant committees.

- b. Councillors

Councillors have four main areas of responsibility:

- To determine Council policy and provide community leadership;
- To monitor and review Council performance in delivering services;
- To represent the Council externally; and
- To act as advocates for their parishioners.
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All Councillors have the same rights and obligations in their relationship with the Clerk and other employees, regardless of their status and should be treated equally.

Councillors should not involve themselves in the day to day running of the Council.

This is the Clerk's responsibility, and the Clerk will be acting on instructions from the Council or its Committees, within an agreed job description.

- c. Chair of Committees

Committee Chairs have additional responsibilities. These responsibilities mean that their relationships with employees may be different and more complex than those of other Councillors. However, they must still respect the impartiality of Officers and must not ask them to undertake work which would prejudice their impartiality.

d. Officers

The role of Officers is to give advice and information to Councillors and to implement the policies determined by the Council.

In giving such advice to Councillors, and in preparing and presenting reports, it is the responsibility of the Officer to express his/her own professional views and recommendations.

An Officer may report the views of individual Councillors on an issue, but the recommendation should be the Officer's own.

If a Councillor wishes to express a contrary view they should not pressurise the Officer to make a recommendation contrary to the Officer's professional view, nor victimise an Officer for discharging his/her responsibilities.

3. Expectations

a. All Councillors can expect:

- a commitment from Officers to the Council as a whole, and not to any individual Councillor, group of Councillors or political group;
- a working partnership;
- Officers to understand and support respective roles, workloads and pressures;
- A timely response from Officers to enquiries and complaints;
- Officer's professional advice, not influenced by political views or personal preferences;
- regular, up to date, information on matters that can reasonably be considered appropriate and relevant to their needs, having regard to any individual responsibilities or positions that they hold;
- Officers to be aware of and sensitive to the public and political environment locally;
- Respect, courtesy, integrity and appropriate confidentiality from Officers;
- training and development opportunities to help them carry out their role effectively;
- not to have personal issues raised with them by Officers outside the Council's agreed procedures;
- that Officers will not use their contact with Councillors to advance their personal interests or to influence decisions improperly;
- that Officers will at all times comply with the relevant code of conduct.

b. Officers can expect from Councillors:

- a working partnership;
- an understanding of, and support for, respective roles, workloads and pressures;
- leadership and direction;
- respect, courtesy, integrity and appropriate confidentiality;
- not to be bullied or to be put under undue pressure;
- that Councillors will not use their position or relationship with Officers to advance their personal interests or those of others or to influence decisions improperly;
- that Councillors will at all times comply with the Council's adopted Code of Conduct.

c. Some General Principles:

- Close personal relationships between Councillors and Officers can confuse their separate roles and get in the way of the proper conduct of Council business, not least by creating a perception in others that a particular Councillor or Officer is getting preferential treatment.

4. Political Groups

- a. National Association of Local Councils policy is that party politics should have no place in Parish Councils. Councillors are there to serve their community as Members

of the community and should not be side-tracked by party political issues. Party politics within a Parish Council can pose particular difficulties in terms of the impartiality of the Clerk and other employees, and the relationship between Councillors and the staff generally.

5. When things go wrong

A council's complaint procedure is not a means of redress for its members or staff. Members and staff are expected to work together professionally even if they hold differences of opinion and views.

Procedure for Officers

- a. From time to time the relationship between Councillors and the Clerk (or other employees) may break down or become strained. Whilst it is always preferable to resolve matters informally, through conciliation by an appropriate third party, it is important that the Council adopts a formal grievance protocol or procedure.
- b. The District Council's Monitoring Officer will be able to offer advice on issues falling within the Monitoring Officer's remit, whilst Suffolk Association of Local Councils will be able to offer advice on procedural matters for the Council. The Society of Local Council Clerks may also be able to provide an independent person.
- c. The Chairman should not attempt to deal with grievances or work-related performance or line management issues on their own. The Council should delegate authority to the Policy and Resources Committee to deal with all personnel matters.
- d. The law requires all employers to have disciplinary and grievance procedures. Adopting a grievance procedure enables individual employees to raise concerns, problems or complaints about their employment in an open and fair way.

Procedure for Members

- e. If a Councillor is dissatisfied with the conduct, behaviour or performance of the Clerk or another employee, the matter should be raised with the Clerk in the first instance. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, it may be necessary to refer the matter to the Clerk's line manager, the Chair who may take steps, in consultation with the Policy & Resources Committee to invoke the Council's disciplinary procedure.
- f. Councillors are free to raise matters of concern in respect of council business by the submission of motion(s) on the agenda for relevant meeting(s) where the issue can be formally considered and resolved in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.
- g. Should this mean re-visiting decisions made within the last six months, Councillors should ensure that this is in compliance with the Council's Standing Order No 7 (Previous Resolutions)